

Why can dirt hurt?

It is great for children to play outside because it is healthy and fun. Touching dirt doesn't hurt but eating or breathing it in can make you sick. Here is a list of things that can contaminate dirt and the health problems they may cause.

Arsenic:

- Cancers
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Skin color changes

Lead: Effects in young children:

- Learning disabilities
- Decreased growth
- Hyperactivity
- Poor balance, memory & hearing

Pesticides:

- Cancers
- Brain damage
- Miscarriage & birth defects

Animal Droppings:

- Stomach problems
- Disease

Allergens:

- Allergic reactions
- Asthma & coughing
- Stomach problems

What happened to our dirt?

- Studies show that dirt in King County may be contaminated with harmful chemicals.
- Contamination came from industry, leaded gasoline, old lead paint, pesticides and natural sources.
- Some chemicals in dirt probably came from air pollution from the now-closed ASARCO copper smelter.

How are children special?



As you know, children are not little adults. A child's body is still growing. Their small bodies are not good at removing poisons that might be in dirt. Kids are extra sensitive to dust, metals and pesticides, things that can make them sick.

Children play on or near the ground and explore with their hands and mouth. Compared to grown-ups, children eat more dirt and breathe twice as much air.

The good news is children do not have to eat dirt or breathe dust. We can prevent these exposures and keep kids healthy!

By Chetana Acharya, NIEHS Center for Ecogenetics & Environmental Health, University of Washington.



What can you do?

Take these steps to keep dirt from harming you:

- ⦿ Wash hands before eating.
- ⦿ Wash toys and pacifiers often.
- ⦿ Damp mop floor to control dust.
- ⦿ Dust with a damp cloth.
- ⦿ Use a rough mat outside the door.
- ⦿ Take off shoes before going indoors.
- ⦿ Cover bare soil with bark, sod or other material, or fence off area.
- ⦿ Eat a diet rich in iron and calcium (dark green leafy vegetables, milk and milk products, dried beans, whole grain, meat and tofu). A healthy diet will prevent your body from absorbing some chemicals.

Keep Yourself Healthy



Keep dirt out of your home:

- ⦿ Use a rough door mat to wipe shoes.
- ⦿ Take off shoes when you go indoors.
- ⦿ Brush off pets before they come in.

A cleaner home helps people with allergies and asthma.

Blood lead testing

A test is available to see if your child has been exposed to lead. Talk to your child's health care provider about a blood test if you are concerned. Public Health recommends children six and under be tested for lead exposure if:

- Your home has peeling paint and was painted before 1987.
- The child tends to eat dirt.
- The child has other possible exposures such as a parent who works in an industry that uses lead.



For more information on arsenic and lead in soil call the Environmental Health Division of Public Health - Seattle & King County at 206-205-4394. Or visit the Public Health website:

www.metrokc.gov/health/tsp/arseniclead.htm



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